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Subject: The Danger of Tampering with Sin.

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A Weekly Publication

OF

SERMONS

PREACHED BY

HENRY WARD BEECHER.

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HENRY WARD BEECHER.

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THE DANGER

OF

TAMPERING WITH SIN.

I shall call your attention to the history which is contained in the 8th chapter of the 2nd Kings, from the 7th verse to the 15th inclusive.

"And Elisha came to Damascus."

Elisha and Elijah were two eminent prophets. Elijah had, not a great while before, disappeared. He was an extraordinary man, stern, imperious, dramatic to the last degree. Elisha was a milder, a far more gentle man; and in his life you will find less rebuke of wrong, less war against evil, and more works and miracles of mercy and of kindness. Nevertheless, a venerable figure he was, standing out and apart upon the background of that dark day in an eminent manner. These old prophets had no prescribed bounds. They roamed to and fro as the spirit carried them. They appeared sometimes in one part of the kingdom and sometimes in another. Occasionally, they had their regular circuits. Samuel did; but he combined with the functions of the prophet's office the judicial functions. Elijah did not. He sometimes watched the imperial power, to judge and to condemn and to execute. Elisha seems almost never to have gone to any such extremes as that; but he had rather a wandering nature—a habit of life impossible to such a state of society as ours, but peculiarly congenial to the condition of things in that nation, and in Oriental nations generally. And at that time he had, for some reason (it is not stated what), gone to Damascus, which lies at the northeast of Palestine.

While there, one day it was told him that the whole street was filling up; that there was a great company of men and a great company of camels. Some one counted the camels. There were forty of them. And the attendants were numerous. They wore the king's livery. And there were distinguished officers among them.

"Benhadad, the King of Syria, was sick; and it was told him, saying, The man of God has come hither."

A most excellent name for an old public servant to honor. Pro-

Sunday Evening, December 19, 1869. Lesson: James I. 12-27. Hymns (Plymouth Collection) Nos. 733, 531, 657.

phets did sometimes honor it. But there have been public servants who have lived long lives, and whom nobody thought of calling *men of God.* But this man, who had been, it might almost be said, in supreme influence, during his time, in his nation, was known even in foreign courts as "the Man of God."

The officer was brought into the prophet's presence. His name was Hazael. He came from the king; and this is the reason of his coming:

"The king said unto Hazael, Take a present in thine hand, and go, meet the man of God, and inquire of the Lord by him, saying, Shall I recover of this disease? So Hazael went to meet him, and took a present with him, even of every good thing of Damascus, forty camels' burden, and came and stood before him and said, Thy son, Benhadad, King of Syria, hath sent to thee, saying, Shall I recover of this disease?"

When kings, when great men are well and are in their royal clothes, they are a great deal better than common folks—at any rate they think so. And common folks are apt to think so too. There is a great deal of worshipping of great men; but there are no men so great that when they are sick they are not just as childish, and just as weak and feeble as anybody else. When a fever takes hold of a man, it never asks "Who is he?" And when a man lies unnerved, unstrung, with all the world apparently passing away from him, his head racked with shooting and fiery pains, and every bone in his body as it were disjointing itself; when a man lies thus a prey to sickness, what is his crown to him? What is his sceptre to him then? What are his treasures to him then? What to him, then, are all the things which he has done in the past? When men lie sick, there is no difference between one and another. And this old Oriental king, who, when he was well, was so proud and haughty, when he was sick sent his chief servant Hazael to "a man of God," saying, "Shall I recover of this disease?" For, as the sequel shows, he was very weak indeed—so weak that he could not lift a cloth. The prophet answers:

"Go say unto him, Thou mayest certainly recover; howbeit, the Lord hath showed me that he shall surely die" [that is to say, there is nothing in his disease to carry him off; and yet he is going to die.]

And then, as the man stood before him, the prophet, lowering his face, gazed full into his eye. He spoke nothing, but looked him through and through, till Hazael could not stand the gaze any longer. He was utterly confused by it. This is the language:

"He settled his countenance steadfastly, until he was ashamed; and the man of God wept."

In other words, he brought his face down, and looked steadily and sternly into Hazael's face, and Hazael was ashamed. He was confused, and he lost countenance before the prophet; and at that the prophet burst into tears.

"And Hazael said, Why weepeth my Lord? And he answered, Because I know the evil that thou wilt do unto the children of Israel: their strongholds wilt thou set on fire, and their young men wilt thou slay with the sword, and wilt dash their children and rip up their women with child."

This declaration shot unaffected horror through the mind of Hazael. He was not a man prepared for the allegation of such cruelties. I have no doubt that his horror was genuine; that it was not dramatic nor excusatory, but real.

"And Hazael said, But what! is thy servant a dog that he should do this great [this abominable] thing? And Elisha answered, The Lord hath showed me that thou shalt be king over Syria."

From that moment, the idea began to take on an active form in his mind-work. And he went back and began his career by telling an out and out lie.

"What said Elisha to thee? [said Benhadad] and he answered, He told me that thou shouldst surely recover. And it came to pass on the morrow that he took a thick cloth and dipped it in water and spread it on his face, so that he died. And Hazael reigned in his stead."

A man extremely reduced by sickness and enfeebled, with a thick cloth thus laid and held over his face, would suffocate speedily; and Hazael took this method, doubtless, that there might be no inquiry; that it might seem that the king had died a natural death. Having put all the men out of the palace, as we may suppose he did, he resorted to this cunning expedient. It may be that he would have experienced a horror at the idea of spilling blood; but then, to take a man's breath away by a clean method, in a skillful manner, was very different, he reasoned, from spilling his blood. He would not do such a thing as shed a man's blood; but he would take a cloth and spread it over his face. And he did not kill the king. It was not he! But the king was dead. And so, as the next step, the army being in his hands already and there being no contestant, he took the crown and sceptre, and was on the throne.

Now the first question which arises here is, was it right for the prophet to put this thing in Hazael's mind? Ought the prophet to have stirred up in him this ambition? Was it right for him to give him encouragement, or even suggestion of the possibility of his reigning in the stead of Benhadad? There is no evidence that the prophet did first put it into his mind, and much evidence that he did not. It is very certain that he did not put into his mind any suggestion of the steps by which he was to become king. It might have been by succession; it might have been years afterwards and in some regular order. There is not a word in the prophet's history which shows that he suggested to Hazael the road by which he was to come to this power, or the method by which he was to attain it. That was Hazael's own work. All he could say was, "The prophet has shown me that

at some time and in some way, I am to be king;" and he found out the time and the way himself.

It is evident, too, that it was only a spark that fell on tinder that was already there. No man can be tempted suddenly to great crime. It is contrary to the nature of the soul. There is to be a preparation for all great wrongs in the foregoing tendencies of the person that commits them. No man becomes a tyrant in a day. No man becomes a miser in a day. No man becomes a drunkard in a day. No person becomes a termagant in a day. No person falls into any great extreme suddenly, as down a precipice. Men come to these things little by little. And if Hazael deliberately committed murder, he had thought about murder before. One man might kill another in a passion without having pondered the matter; but no man ever deliberately killed another man who had not thought about it before. No man ever committed an illustrious wickedness without having pondered, if not the thing itself, yet the possibilities of it. Men think, oftentimes, "I would not kill that man—of course I would not; but then, what if he were killed? What would happen?" And then they detail to themselves all the blessings which would come from it. "With this obstacle out of my path," they say, "there would be this benefit to me; this augmentation of my estate; this increase of my power." And so men build castles in the air, and brood upon wrong and crime, and prepare themselves by brooding, for giving away under temptation.

Now, do you suppose Hazael had never had in his mind the thought, "Why should not I be king?" He had administered the king's whole power. He had tasted the sweets of power. He had known all the machinery of government. And he had said often to himself, "The sword fits my hand, as well as my organization; and why would not the sceptre too?" He had pondered this question; and doubtless he meant at some time or other to take advantage of his position and sit upon the throne. And when the prophet said to him, "God has revealed to me that thou shalt be king," it did not teach him anything that he had not thought of before. It was just what he had thought about. And he turned his face and said, "Is it not time for me to be king? And what is in the way? What is easier than to put this old sick, weak king out of the way? I will do it." And he did do it. And it was his fault.

Then what of that exclamation of horror—"Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?" This was not uttered in reference to the fact that he was to be king, but in reference to the declaration that when king he would be a cruel king, and that he would seek the destruction of Israel, and murder women and children, and

exercise power in the most tyrannical and oppressive manner. It was at this that Hazael revolted. And yet, it came to pass that he reigned for about forty years in Damascus; and during that time he wrested away from Israel all their possessions east of the river Jordan (they were extensive and valuable possessions) and drove them through the land even into Philistia. And he laid siege to Jerusalem. And after destroying the land, he was bribed from taking the city of Jerusalem only by receiving all the treasures of the temple. And in his military career he did inflict all the miseries that had been foreshadowed by the prophet, and more.

From this history some points of instruction may be derived.

You cannot predict, from a man's early natural disposition, what he will be capable of. There is a gradual unfolding which takes place both in good and in bad. And though it is true that a naturally good disposition is a very great advantage, and creates some presumptions in favor of a man, yet natural dispositions are not enough. Men need something more than that which simply makes them appear amiable and lovely in the beginning. For, if a man has ever so amiable and kind a disposition, it is possible for him to lapse from one step to another, and from that to another, and from that to yet another, until by-and-by he is far down below that disposition. Nothing can save a man but firm habits, steadfast principles, and the grace of God in confirmation of them. No natural endowment of amiableness can keep a man from being spoiled; for although a man may not, with such a disposition as this, rush into every sin, yet every man will be tempted according to the disposition that is in him. And though he may not be accessible to all kinds of sin and temptation, yet there is some one line in which he is accessible. Every man may be so tempted that, although in his youth everything was fair, in his old age everything turns out blighted.

If you could, by some power from on high, go back and read the early history of men who have made shipwreck of life; if you could look upon the faces which they bore when they were beautiful, amiable, sweet children, beloved of father and mother, and around whom all hopes clustered; and if you could see how promising was their early manhood; and then contrast this with their old age, when they are blighted, scarred with passions, disgraced by crime, utterly wrecked morally, you would be amazed at their rapid and complete deterioration. There has been many a man who has swung on the gallows, and many another who ought to; there has been many a man who has lain in prison, and many another who ought to have been his companion; there has been many a man who has been marked by public reprobation; there has been many a man that has been swept by

bankruptcy and disgrace, who in the beginning of life had just the same chance of being honored and beloved while living, and lamented when dead, which those men had who have reached saintship. You cannot tell by the way a man feels to-day how he will feel a year hence, or six years hence.

It is not enough, then, that a man should have simply good dispositions or good intents. When Hazael received the declaration that he should become a monster of cruelty there can be no question but that it affected him with horror. He did not believe it then. And yet, the seed and root were in him, and it required but the appropriate circumstances and temptations to bring them out.

This leads me to say that men are capable of a course at which their whole nature revolts. But it must be through a gradual reduction to a lower condition. Each step toward it will be slight. There will be few plunges in the early periods of decadence. Men do at first things that are right in themselves. Then they go still further along through things that are not wrong in themselves.. Then they go still further along in things that, if they are equivocal, can scarcely be called positively pernicious. I think that men in evil courses are like persons who go down winding stairs. The upper stairs hide the lower ones, so that they can see only three or four steps before them. Men go down courses of pleasure and vice and crime, seeing only one or two steps in a whole career. And so each step is a slight one. Although the whole of their career may be monstrous, there is no one single point of it, clear down to its very last stages, that taxes very much their fear or their conscience. Men seldom, until they become hardened, do wholesale wickedness. That is the last part. That takes place when men are given once to do iniquity. But in all the early stages, in all those periods in which men think they are perfectly safe, the peculiarity is that they take short steps, and but few of them, adding a little more to-day, and a little more to-morrow, and a little more next week, and a little more next month, and a little more next year, and a little from year to year. And so they are gradually demoralized and carried down, until at last they are destroyed. That which there was no power to do suddenly, in time they have done themselves. There are persons, some forty-five and some fifty years old, some younger and some older, of whom people, looking on them, would say, "What monster is that?" And yet they are persons who came to their degradation without a shock, little by little, little by little.

This is the reason and philosophy of keeping aloof from courses which lower the moral tone of the mind. There are very many courses in life which are wrong, not because the things themselves are wrong, not because the immediate consequences are mischievous, but because

they have an effect upon the mind to lower its moral tone. A man, for instance, may begin in things that at first do not particularly violate honor. He may be sensitive and high-minded. And yet these things may have a tendency to depress the tone of honor. And they may be repeated until by-and-by that man's feeling on the subject of honor and his power of resistance to dishonor, is so dull and feeble that when there comes, at length, after this discipline and gradual change, the appropriate temptation, he will do that which is dishonorable and scarcely feel it. It is the early steps that lead a man to wrong under such circumstances. They gradually bring him into a condition in which he is predisposed to wrong.

Men are seldom stricken down with malaria when they first go into malarial regions. Frequently the disease does not show itself until the second or third year. And persons living in new countries often rejoice in their immunity. I have lived where chills and fever was prevalent, and heard a great deal about it, and seen other people have it; and I noticed that often they escaped until the second year; but during the first year they were breathing the malarial atmosphere, and a gradual process of poisoning was going on in them which had not disclosed itself. But the moment it did disclose itself they broke down under the disease. I feared that I should have it; but I was not susceptible to such things. I seemed to have a peculiar temperament in that respect. The facts, therefore, showed that a man in one state being attacked by disease would take it, whereas a man in another state would not. If a man has vigor and resiliency of nerve; if there is that in him which, when he comes into the atmosphere of contagious diseases fights them and throws them off, then he can walk in the midst of dangers and be safe. But if there is a certain lack of tone and resisting power in his system, he breaks down.

It is precisely that state which is the most dangerous in the early life of young men and maidens. It is that moral condition in which there is a want of tone and resisting power, so that when sudden temptation comes upon them their system breaks down under it. It is not alone necessary that a man should not do technically wrong. You are not safe when you simply keep your feet from known sins. No man is safe who does not keep his heart as in the fear of God. A man must *abhor* wickedness. He must *love* that which is right. In this temperament, if I may so say, of the soul there is safety; but there are ten thousand flitting pleasures, ten thousand associations, ten thousand acts in the life of young men and maidens, which, though they are not wrong in themselves, have a tendency to drag men down lower and lower, and more and more weaken their resisting power and prepare them for the attack of evil when it comes by-and-by. And one

reason why so many fall so quickly and so completely when the stress of temptation overtakes them, is that they have been gradually and imperceptibly brought into a condition in which they were predisposed to corruption under evil influences. Their final destruction is the legitimate result of the way in which they have been tampering with themselves.

People say, "Is it wrong for a man to read any books he chooses, if he never allows himself to go wrong? There are books, of course, that I should not want to read in my family, nor in the presence of ladies; but they are extremely entertaining and I read them; and I do not think that there is any danger in it for me. Why not read all books and see all sorts of pictures and places?" Because no man can render himself familiar with such things, even out of curiosity, without marring his purity, without dulling his sensibility, without lowering the tone of his resisting power, in which is his safety. I do not care who you are, if you acquaint yourself with evil from no other motive than curiosity, you are not safe. A man who, as a teacher, or a censor in literature, has the unpleasant duty imposed upon him of probing and exposing wickedness, may fulfill that duty and not be harmed, for the reason that he is acting with his mind under the predominant influence of benevolence and obligation; but when a man, merely for the sake of gratifying his curiosity, goes into the midst of things that are perverting in their tendency, he is taking out of his nerve that which gives his nerve the whole of its preservative power. I regard, therefore, as most pernicious, the familiarity which men have with bad men; with vulgar courses; with low conversation; with obscene wit and stories. Men who call themselves respectable are accustomed to listen to operas and plays that are inherently bad, as portraying the most loathsome crimes and vices. There is many an opera in New York whose central element is reeking lust of the most detestable and hideous character. Nothing can be worse. But then they take a silk string and wind about it; they cover it up with exquisite little airs and melodies and scenes, and men go to enjoy themselves; and more and more they become fascinated, and gradually they lose their manliness. If you say anything to them on the subject, they say, "Why, I do not care for those things." Ah! can a person let those outrageous abominations be dressed up so exquisitely and dance so gaily before their eyes that they do not think they are wicked, and be unharmed? I do not believe in that purity or that integrity which can become so accustomed to prurient sins in life that they gently pass before them without a revolt. I believe that as a true ear is actually pained by hideous discords, not because the books or the philosophy of music proclaims that they are disagreeable, but because they stab the ear; so a pure

nature hates all that is salacious, not because custom or religion says it is bad, but because all the power of the soul feels that it is positively abominable. And if to any persons they are not abominable, it is because they have lost their sensibility. There are a thousand things which men do, and which are permitted to be done in society, which wear away the enamel, rub off the bloom, destroy the freshness of the sensibility, but their ultimate tendency is not taken into account and men think they are not dangerous. There are a thousand liberties that men take in the various relations of life which are full of peril. Little things they are; but the very grounds on which we stand in maintaining decorous observances in the family and in the community, are the grounds on which we are to stand in condemning these little levities. They gradually lower the tone of the moral feelings, till by-and-by all resisting power is gone, so that when temptation comes all is destroyed.

Children should be taught that the customs and observances of society which have relation to propriety of conduct, are not founded on simple prejudice but are the results of wise legislation and experience, and that they stand between a man and corruption.

I have given a direction in respect to the passions; but the same is true in respect to all the other great master influences. A child is brought up wholesomely, and the law of the household is that a man ought never to praise himself and seek flattery, or anything of the kind. At length he goes into society, where compliments and flatteries are exchanged, and where everybody is fishing for compliments and flatteries. "Have you one for me? I have one for you." This is everywhere going on. And the child at first is shocked. But after a time his sense of propriety becomes accustomed to it. And by-and-by he is just as big a peacock as anybody. And every single step from beginning to end of this change is a step of decadence and decline.

The same is true of pride. And the same is true, also, of avarice. A man may begin very generously; and by almost imperceptibly minute steps he may become a hard-handed curmudgeon.

"There is a way which seemeth right unto a man; but the ends thereof are death."

There are very few people who, if they saw the ends of wrong courses, would venture upon them. There are very few people who, if they traced the results of evil-doing to the end of life would indulge in it.

There are thousands of persons whose lives were nobler in the family than they are in the world. There are thousands of men who had more honor and principle and generosity and moral purity, when they left their father's house, than they have ever had since. Honor

that man who has gone through life without loss in real manliness, and increasing in moral vigor and purity all the way down. Happy is that man who grows better as he grows older. But how many are there of such? Have you grown better from your childhood up? Do you think you are cleaner-minded than you ever were before? Do you think you have a truer conscience, a more sensitive honor and a greater abhorrence of all that is mean and wicked? Do you feel that you have become attuned and chorded in integrity by the whole effect of life upon you?

Irreverence is permitted in the same way. There is every temptation in society to irreverence. Sacred things are handled familiarly by men. There is such a disposition to boldness, and rank, intemperate familiarity which grows up with democratic institutions, that neither the Church, nor any sacred book, nor usage, nor thing, nor even the name of God has any considerable respect among men.

Men ask me, "What is the harm of profanity? When a man says '*Damn*,' he does not mean *Damn*. When a man says 'Curse it,' of course he does not mean *Curse it*. And when he says, 'G—d d—n it,' of course he does not mean anything. There is no great harm in that, is there?" Is there no harm in a man's pursuing a course which steadily wears out the whole sentiment? Is there no harm in reading books that lower your faith or belief in truth? Is there no harm in talking with men who destroy your confidence in things spiritual? Is there no harm in indulging in expressions with regard to things sacred, that are like rasps, wearing down the very surface and taking off the very skin? There is harm in all the various modes of destroying sentiment and the root of veneration and reverence.

Now in all these things I go back again to the thought that in the beginning men do not mean wrong.

When fishermen are on the shore looking for bass and bullfish, they are accustomed to chop up a great deal of bait when the tide is right, and let it float out as a kind of lure. And the fish, that have a kind of telegraphic communication of their own, pass the word round, "There is something to eat;" and they come flocking up in shoals; and one seizes one morsel, and another another morsel, and another another; till by-and-by the cunning fisherman puts a morsel on a hook and throws it out. And soon some unsuspecting fish comes up and takes it, hook and all, and presently he is flopping on the shore!

It is just so that the devil fishes for men. There is this morsel here, and that morsel there, which men take with impunity; and they think there is no danger and wax bold; and by-and-by they get hold of a morsel with a hook in it. It is not wise for men to feed where there are fishermen about, fishing for their souls that they may destroy

them. Ten thousand things there are which are "innocent in themselves," as men say, but which are thrown out as lures, and by which multitudes are drawn into things which are not innocent. Hence it is that men are not to consider themselves safe when they simply watch against specific evils. We are to watch against particular temptations; but we are also to watch our inward dispositions. A man is to watch the whole temper of his mind and soul. When he does this, and only then, he is safe.

It is declared in the passage which I read in the opening service,

"Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed." "Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."

There is a period in the future, there is a coming time, when the thing which at first seemed so harmless shall be grown, and shall bring forth its fruit, and shall prove to be a monster, and turn and devour you. Therefore you are to take care of the foregoing dispositions and early states and stages of your experience.

I would to God that some prophet could come with authority, and stand in my place, and lower his face, and look fixedly upon the young that are here. I wish that at that young person, cheerful, gay, sweet-minded, apparently amiable and gentle, but with a rotten point of self-indulgence in him, which leads him to live from day-to-day for the present sensation, for the pleasure of the present hour, without regard to the benefit of to morrow or the next hour—I wish that at that young person the prophet could stand and look, prophesying and showing what that self-indulgence will lead him to far down in his career, and how it makes him accessible to all those who can tickle his vanity, and renders him a prey to every seduction and will leave him, by-and-by, a child of damnation. Oh! thou round of cheek, smooth of brow, and serene of eye, thou wilt die in a brothel! "What," you say, "Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this thing?" Oh no, not now—not until you have forgotten much of home; not until you have had wound around you the fascinations of flattering society; not until a thousand influences have dazed your mind; not until the day appointed comes. But then, "*when lust hath conceived, it will bring forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, will bring forth death.*"

Is it cruel to say so? But oh! is it not a greater cruelty that it should be true? My heart is pained when I know what is going on in life. Hideous stories come down to us of monsters of mythology that claimed some virgin at every festival to be given to its maw; but we sacrifice, not single ones, but hecatombs. And how cool is the public pulse! how little indignation there is! How many there have been, born and built with angelic mould, full of thought that might have made them majestic as kings and transcendent in loveliness, whose

early steps were such as to lower their moral tone, and who kept sliding down and down until they were destroyed, utterly and without remedy.

"Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil."

I would that the prophet could lay his eye upon some young men that I see, who are healthy and strong and noble in their purposes, but who say that they are going to be free and independent, that they are not going to be bound by superstitious precedents. Wine bad? Not to them. Tippling bad? "Yes, to fools, but not to young men of my spirit." Drinking in a social way bad? They scorn the idea that they need to bind themselves with a pledge, or to turn out of their way to insure them against becoming drunkards. Oh Prophet! where art thou? Look upon these young men, and say to them, "I see you early overthrown; I see you early death-struck; I see you dying in disgrace; I see you lying in a drunkard's grave." They would say, "Is thy servant a dog, that these things should be true of him?" Yes, you are a dog, of whom just these things are true. If you are not afraid; if your hand is reached out for the cup when it is red and you have no concern; if you scorn the warning which is afforded by ten thousand instances of men who are just as good as you, and just as strong as you are, but who tampered with the cup and were destroyed, it requires no prophet to foretell the issue. I can myself tell what the end shall be. Here are thousands and thousands, and some that I know, who are dying now from this very cause. Their life looked as fair as yours; their hopes were as bright as yours; they were as certain of their power to retrace their steps in time to save themselves as you are; and yet they have fallen and are perishing. Oh! that men would ponder these things.

I behold men of generous impulses starting in life on certain courses; and I know what the end will be. I see men sacrificing themselves for gain. I see men giving their time for mere money. They do not care for the welfare of the community. They are not interested in charitable enterprises. They have no sympathy for the unfortunate classes. And yet they are men who, before they were attacked by the delirium of avarice, had generous and noble natures. I know what will become of them. They grow up more and more avaricious and less and less manly. As their riches increase, their manhood dies out. And I see them forsaking, one after another, their old companions that are not profitable. I see that as they pile up treasure, their generosity diminishes. There is a fever of gain which a man who is inspired to watch can discern. And I see them at last, lying back in their pondering moments, and turning over and over their money. Night and day they live for money. And every other thing is destroyed in them

except the love of gain. They are utterly carried away by avarice. If I had told them when they began, that they were coming to this, they would have said, "Is thy servant a dog?" And yet, those very steps which they were then taking were steps by which they would inevitably become misers.

And so of every other wrong course—for time fails me, and I can not carry out in detail any further, the thoughts which are suggested by this general history.

We are all of us either advancing from strength to strength to appear before God, or we are, consciously or unconsciously, drifting further and further from the early period of innocence; from the early honor; from the early faith. We are drawing near to the heavenly land; but oh! with what freight do we go? What love we in the world? What has been our life? We had a fair start, most of us; how have we improved our opportunities? There are some who had not a fair start. There are some who had drunken parents. I have in my mind now two men who were the children of worthless parents, but who worked upon the farm to support themselves and earned their way through college; and now both stand high in the Christian ministry. And I know men who were born of Christian parents, who were the children of Christian ministers and who had everything to help them, both in regard to organization and precept, during their childhood, but who have worked their way straight down, until they are miserable wrecks and outcasts. But, thank God! if there are persons that go away from the Christian instruction of their childhood, there are also persons who do not. I have known many persons who, though they came out of the battle scarred, nevertheless grew better as they grew older. Are you growing better as you grow older?

Fellow citizens, men, brethren, is not this practical business? The year is drawing to an end. You are going fast to your account. I see in many of you the signs of decay. I bear them myself. I am no longer a young man; and you, many of you, have passed your youth. Do you ever take an account, an inventory with yourself? Do you ever say, "What am I? How do I compare with what I used to be? Am I harder, or more generous? Am I truer, or am I less scrupulous? Have I divine wisdom, or have I sneering, worldly wisdom?" Are you nearer to the spirit of Christ than you used to be? Are you nearer to the spirit of God? Are you better prepared for the society of angels than you were half a score of years ago? Does the world hold you less tenaciously than it did? Do you feel prepared to let go, if it be the will of God, this year? Can you say, when you meet your God, not, "I am spotless"—oh, no; but, "I love, I honor, I adore Thee above all, as the Chief among ten thousand and the one altogether

lovely?" Is the language of reverence and love possible to your life? How have you been living? How are you living? Will you not take this home to yourself to-night, and make inquisition into yourselves? You know better than anybody else what secret thoughts and feelings you have cherished, and what secret sins you have committed. You know what your actions have been, and what the motives of those actions have been; and you can take a general account of your life. And why not be faithful to yourselves? Is there any use of cheating yourselves? I can understand how a bad accountant might make up a false account to cheat his employers; but I cannot understand how a merchant could make up a false account to cheat himself. And will you make up your moral account so as to blind your eyes and hoodwink yourselves, and stagger on for years, and at last plunge into the other world all unprepared to meet your Judge and the judgment?

It is not enough to say, "Is thy servant a dog, that he should do these things?" Ah! many and many a man has done everything that he abhorred in the beginning. Many and many a man has fallen upon every evil that he dreaded in the beginning. Many and many a man has made shipwreck of faith, though at first he started for the other thing. I beseech of you take heed. Read the lessons that are around about you. Watch men and see what their lives are. Listen to the testimony of God's word. Call God to your side, and yield yourself to his will. By prayer, and by faith, and by reliance upon the power of the Holy Ghost, live so that at whatever hour the Son of Man may come, he shall find you right and willing to depart and be with Christ, which is better than life.

PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON.

We humble ourselves before thee, our Father. We draw near to thee in the spirit of children: and yet of children that have gone wrong. We are conscious of our sins. We are conscious that we have sinned against our own light and knowledge. Thou hast had occasion to be offended with us. Thou mightest long ago have been discouraged and cast us off. It is the nature of thy love to endure. Thou art long-suffering, patient, slow to anger, quick to relent. Thy nature is healing to sin, and none shall open their hearts to let in thine influence and go uncleansed. The fire of thy Spirit shall burn up the dross. The purity of thy soul shall cleanse the impurity of ours. The truth of thy thought shall straighten out the crookedness, the lies, the falsity, in us. Thou wilt pour through the soul those tides of the divine spirit that shall cleanse it; and by thy power we shall be regenerated, ennobled, lifted up into the likeness of God. And into our souls breathe the filial spirit, so that we shall call out in every hour, in every spontaneous moment, "Our Father which art in heaven."

We thank thee for all thy bounty which there is in the fatherhood of God. Oh! what comfort we have plucked from it already! It has reached above our heads as a vine that grew by diminution; for all we have taken of thine over-arching care has but caused it to put forth new clusters. Thou art giving without diminishing the supply. Oh! what consolation have we had when we fled from the terror of thy law; when we fled from the relentless aspects of nature, and found the warmth and sympathy of thy paternal heart! Thou art good. Thou art not only good but thou art merciful. How gentle are thy ways towards us! Grant that thy goodness and thy gentleness may win us more than terror and more than necessity. Grant that our hearts, moved by honor and by duty and by love, may turn unto thee and to thy ways. May we desire thy favor more than all other things. Thou knowest the battle of every one. Thou knowest the temptation that to every one is most potent. Thou knowest where are our weaknesses and what are our infirmities. Thou dost behold the doubtful conflict. Thou hast watched over us with more than tender watching and care than ever a mother watched over a child. We need not tell thee who we are. We need not tell thee what we are.

Lord Jesus! but for thy grace, we should have perished; and by thy grace we are what we are in good. Yet continue thy good to us. Inspire us and strengthen us and lift us up as things that are mighty to the destruction of pride and selfishness and appetite and every evil way. Turn us to thyself. Be school-master to us in love. Discipline us. Instruct us. Guide us to the knowledge of all that is good; and may our inclination follow our knowledge. May we have the way of righteousness. And, we beseech of thee, be near to those who are yet too weak to walk, and to all that are cast down and cannot rise up, and to all that are taken captive by sin and cannot release themselves, and to all that are snared, and to all that are slumbering, being stupefied by sin. O thou Healer! draw near. Thou Deliverer! appear for the rescue of souls that are in peril. There are many who make feeble cry to thee, not because they deserve aught but because it is thy heart's delight to do good, that they have faith in thee. And we beseech of thee that thou wilt help those who seek to help others. Give them wisdom. Inspire them with prudence. Give them might and power upon the hearts of their fellows. May all that seek to lead men in Godly ways be themselves lead by God. May those who seek to injure men, to carry them down, and to make mischief of happiness, be met with rebuke and overthrown by the breath of thy mouth and the brightness of thy coming.

Oh! hasten that day when all men shall learn the lore of love. Hasten that day when thy Spirit shall be breathed into all thy churches, and through thy churches into all the community; when laws and government shall be

founded and administered in righteousness; when all the institutions of society shall be filled with the spirit of heaven. Grant that that blessed day of prediction may come when sorrow and sighing shall flee away, when cruelty shall cease, when superstition and ignorance shall depart, and when the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord as the waters fill the sea. Oh! hasten that long-delaying day. Grant that those who labor for it and die without the sight, giving place to other generations that labor and die again without the sight, and all of us may behold it, if not upon these shores, yet in our Father's kingdom. For this world is thine own. Oh Jesus! thou hast redeemed it by thy precious blood. Thou shalt win it through the dark ages. Thou art the Traveler unknown, seeking it. Thou shalt find it. Thou shalt cleanse it. Thou shalt ordain purity and justice and truth and love. And all the world shall see thy salvation.

Make haste then, consummate thy promises. Fulfill the blessedness of thine intent. Bring in on this earth all thy mighty power.

And to the Father, the Son and the Spirit shall be praise everlasting. *Amen.*

PRAYER AFTER THE SERMON.

Our Father, we beseech of thee that thou wilt bless the word of instruction which we have endeavored to give. May all those who are in the morning of life take heed to their courses. May all those upon whom thou hast placed the burden and heat of the day watch warily, knowing whose adversaries abound on every side. May those who have passed the years of their lives, and are standing in their autumn days, more than ever see that they are prepared to meet their God. May there be no more delay. May there be no more excuses. May men no more deny their duty, or turn away from their Saviour. Lift up thy cross, and make it glow before the eyes of every one. And may there be many who shall be won to it, and subdued by it, to the honor of thy name, through Jesus Christ our Redeemer. *Amen.*

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